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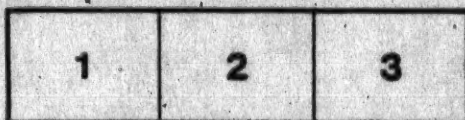
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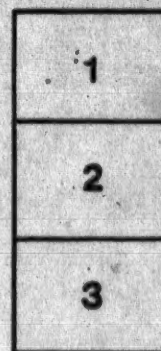
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AN
ADDRESS
TO
THE MEMBERS OF
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NOVASCOTIA,

ON THE IMPROPRIETY AND INCONSISTENCY OF THE CONDUCT
OF PARENTS, WHO SOLICIT AND CLAIM BAPTISM FOR
THEIR CHILDREN, WHILE THEY HABITUAL-
LY NEGLECT THE OBSERVANCE OF
THE LORD'S SUPPER.

BY ORDER OF THE SYNOD.

Rev James R. P. O. D.

"What profit is there of circumcision? Much every
way."—ROM. III. 1, 5.

PICTOU—1847.

Printed by E. M. McDonald, for the Synod.

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF NOVASCOTIA.

DEAR BRETHREN:—

The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia, whom the Holy Ghost has made your overseers, "watch for your souls, as they that must give account."^{*} They rejoice with you in your prosperity. They sympathise with you in your adversities. They joy when they "behold your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."[†] They are grieved when that order is subverted, and when any "led away by the error of the wicked, fall from their own steadfastness."[‡] They "thank God always on your behalf for the grace which is given you by Jesus Christ;"^{||} and they feel the *necessity* which is upon them; "according to the dispensation of God which is given to them to fulfil the word of God; to warn every man, and to teach every man in all wisdom, that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."[¶]

The children of Issachar are said in holy writ to be "men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."[§] Christian prudence requires that to a cer-

^{*} Heb. xlii. 17. [†] Col. ii. 5. [‡] 2 Peter iii. 17. ^{||} 1 Cor. i. 4.
[¶] Col. i. 25, 28. [§] 1 Chron. xii. 32.

tain extent, we adapt our modes of procedure, our instruction, and our discipline, to the social condition of those among whom we labor. Under the Mosaic economy, usages and practices were permitted, on account of the hardness of the hearts of the Jews, which the superior privileges and attainments of New Testament times utterly repudiate. In the Apostolic age, Paul *supposed it to be good for the present distress*, or necessity, to adopt a mode of life, the universal and permanent adoption of which would undermine the foundations of the social state. At the Reformation it was "*thocht gude for avoyding greater inconvenientis*," that certain admitted corruptions should be permitted to remain for a time; yet it was declared to be "*not tolerabil to continew in the lyke abuse*"*. The founders of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia sometimes conformed to prevailing customs, and yielded to prejudices which, in different circumstances, they would doubtless have stoutly withstood. Like their brethren who preceded them in missionary labor in the western world, they believed that "many things might be excusable and even expedient, in peculiar circumstances of the Church, which would be quite improper in a more orderly, settled state of public affairs."† Without asserting or impugning the propriety of their conduct in such compliances, we cordially embrace the testimony of the U. A. Synod, which maintains that "it is the duty of the Church, as well as of the Christian, to go on to perfection."—"Our profession, it has been justly said, is neither more nor less than a practical adherence to the explanatory standards of the Church, as a proper groundwork for progressive reformation."‡

The practice of administering baptism to the children of parents, who habitually neglect the observance of the Lord's Supper, has hitherto extensively prevailed. Proceeding as the Synod firmly believes it does, from erroneous opinions respecting the nature of the Sacrament, and of Church fel-

*Sec. Book of Discip., chap. xi., 7. †Nar. &c., of the U. A. Presbytery of Pennsylvania, p. 17. ‡Testimony, p. 15.

lowship, on the part of parents, who in these circumstances solicit and claim baptism for their children; and connected with compliance on the part of him who administers the rite, which cannot be justified, its practical tendencies have been, and in the nature of the case cannot but be, extensively injurious to the interests of religion. In consequence of permitting its continuance so long amongst us, we have become a reproach and a bye-word to more consistent Presbyterian bodies. The whole Church is therefore deeply interested in its speedy and entire removal. In their endeavors to accomplish this object, the Synod desire to proceed with due caution and tenderness. They might at once have issued an injunction, forbidding ministers and Sessions to baptize the children of such parents, as habitually neglect to observe the dying command of the Redeemer, by sitting down at his table. But your spiritual overseers do not wish to exercise "dominion over your faith."* They would not have your "faith stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."† As in the natural body, the removal of those irregularities which constitute disease, can be rationally expected, only by the removal of the causes which have produced them, so in our attempts to remove those irregularities in the ecclesiastical body, which mar its beauty, enfeeble its activities, and impair its efficiency, we must address ourselves to the correction of the erroneous opinions in which the evil has originated. Pursuing this method, the Synod labour to reform this abuse by endeavoring to instruct those who have been committed to their care, in the truth as it is in Jesus.

The remote effects of unsound but commonly received principles, often remain and develope themselves with great distinctness, long after the principles themselves have been exploded. The time has been, when in almost every part of Christendom, Baptism was considered as indispensable to

*2 Cor. i. 24. †1 Cor. ii. 5.

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salvation. Persons dying unbaptized, were unhesitatingly declared to be excluded from heaven, and consequently were denied the usual rites of Christian burial. In cases of emergency, laymen, and even women, were permitted to administer the ordinance, lest leaving the world unbaptized, the gates of the heavenly city should be fast closed against the unhappy individual. The same mistaken opinion respecting the indispensable necessity of this ordinance in order to salvation, and of its power to confer grace upon the soul of the recipient, led to its indiscriminate administration. Few if any enquiries were made respecting the religious knowledge or personal piety of the parents. It was sufficient that they were free from the suspicion of heresy. In these circumstances it is not wonderful that men should have exhibited an eagerness to obtain this rite for their offspring, far beyond that which they manifested for the observance of other means of grace, in their own sphere equally important and valuable.

Again, at the same period, the firm belief generally prevailed, that in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the elements of bread and wine were changed into the real body and blood of Christ. The opinion that in this Sacrament Christ was not only spiritually but corporeally present—that the communicant beheld and tasted the real body and blood of Christ,—tended to throw an adventitious solemnity around it, which terrified tender and weak consciences, and made even the stout-hearted approach the table with emotions of reverence and awe which he seldom experienced in the observance of other ordinances.

But though these errors, in their more gross and palpable forms, have been long exploded, and can never find acceptance in any Church based upon sound Protestant principles; yet among those of our communion whose opportunities for acquiring religious information have been limited, vestiges of these superstitious notions may be easily detected, and their remote effects are often developed with painful dis-

distinctness. To them we trace the irregularities upon which we are now animadverting. They originated and fostered the opinion that baptism, if not absolutely indispensable to salvation, is of such urgent necessity, that, in cases of emergency, the order which the Head of the Church has established, and which in ordinary circumstances they admit ought scrupulously to be observed, may be violated,—that the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is much more solemn than the ordinance of Baptism,—that the qualifications necessary for admission to the former are much higher than those which are required for admission to the latter,—and that a person may conscientiously and quite consistently present his infant seed to God in Baptism, who would sin grievously were he to presume to sit down at the Lord's table. The extent to which these opinions prevail, and the irregularities which they have occasioned, injurious alike to our character as a Church and our religious prosperity, call loudly for the action of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Court, in order to their speedy and entire removal. To prepare the way for the attainment of this end, the Synod affectionately and importunately solicit your attention to the following doctrinal statements:—

1—Baptism is not a regenerating ordinance. A person may be, and many are, regenerated without or before Baptism; and many who have been baptized give ample though melancholy evidence, that they are still strangers to the grace of the Gospel. Though you may admit the truth of these statements in general, yet that the opposite opinion exercises a powerful influence over your feelings, is evident from the two following considerations:

1st, From the term by which the administration of this rite is frequently designated. The person baptized is often said to have been *christened*. Some, it may be admitted, employ the expression through inattention, and some through ignorance; many, however, it is to be feared, employ it of design. With such, *to christen* and *to make christian*, are expressions of the

very same import. The use of the term often betrays the lurking feeling of the mind, even where the sentiment, when distinctly stated, may be partially disavowed. It is an expression handed down from that Church which maintains that Baptism "cleanseth from original sin, and makes" the persons baptized, "christians and children of God;" and the customary and frequent use of it indicates a community of feeling with the doctrine upon which it is based.

That inaccurate opinions, influencing both feelings and conduct, extensively prevail upon this point, appears farther:

2dly, From the eagerness and anxiety which many parents manifest, to obtain baptism for their children, when supposed to be dying, contrasted with the indifference and criminal neglect with which they habitually treat other ordinances, equally of divine appointment. Persons calling upon a minister, it may be at midnight, to baptize a child, because very sick and apparently dying, or otherwise hurrying on the administration of that ordinance, in circumstances in which the prescribed order of the Church cannot be observed, show plainly that they attach more importance to the external rite than the Scriptures warrant, and that no small degree of superstitious emotion mingles with the feelings with which it is desired.* That Baptism has no efficacy of *itself*, to regenerate the soul, and that it is not essential to salvation, are truths *most surely believed among us*. On this subject the standards of our Church use no ambiguous language. In the fifth section of the twenty-eighth chapter, the Confession of Faith contains the following explicit statement:—"Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated." This statement is in exact accordance with scriptural examples. The Ethiopian Eunuch was a

* See Appendix, extract No. 1.

believer before he was baptized.* The Holy Ghost fell upon those who heard the word in the house of Cornelius, before they were baptized. The fact that the Holy Ghost had fallen upon them is assigned as a sufficient reason why they should receive this solemn and important ordinance.† In all cases of adult baptism, a profession of faith, which presupposes regeneration, is indispensably necessary previous to the reception of this seal of the covenant. It is evident therefore, that there may be regeneration without baptism. Equally evident is it from Scripture, that there may be baptism without regeneration. Simon Magus was baptized by an Apostle, yet after the reception of that ordinance, the same Apostle by whom it had been dispensed, declared that he had *neither part nor lot* in the possession of the gifts and graces of the spirit—that “his heart” was “not right in the sight of God”—and that he was “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”‡ Of the same truth we have painful evidence, in the unholy lives of many to whom baptism has been dispensed. In fact, the principal design of the sacraments is to be *confirming*, not *converting* ordinances. They are seals annexed to the covenant of grace, for the confirmation of the faith of the believer. To suppose that they are primarily designed to be means of conversion and regeneration, and to employ them for that purpose, is not only to mistake, but to pervert, the principal end of their institution.

2.—Infants of believing parents do not become members of the Church, by being baptized. The doctrine of our standards is, that they are members of the Church *by birth*; and baptism is a public acknowledgment of that relationship. In the testimony emitted by the General Associate Synod in 1801, it is asserted that “in baptism the children of professing parents are not made christians, but are supposed to

* Acts viii. 37. † Acts i. 47. ‡ Acts viii. 21, 23.

be already such, as being *born members of the Church.*^{*}

In the doctrinal statements of the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church, adopted and sanctioned in 1827, language to the same effect is employed. "Baptism ought to be regarded as *declarative* of connection with the Church."[†]

Again, "one *special* design of the ordinance is, to acknowledge the baptized as Church members; and therefore the Church has a right to know *what claims they have by their parentage*, to such an acknowledgment."[‡] The children of Jewish parents were members of the Church before they were circumcised.

This is evident from the threatening of excision from the congregation of Israel, wherever there was neglect or contempt of this seal of the covenant. "The uncircumcised manchild, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken my covenant."^{||} Now, as there can be no *cutting off* where there is no connection, it plainly follows from this threatening, that, under the former economy, the children of Jewish parents were members of the Church before they were circumcised.

The same doctrine may be proved from the appointment of circumcision to be the sign or token of a covenant previously made, and of a justified state previously attained.[¶] By a parity of reasoning we conclude, that the infant seed of parents, one of whom is a believing professor, are members of the Church by birth, and that the administration of baptism is to them an *acknowledgement, declaration*, or recognition of a connection with the Church previously subsisting.

3. Joining the Church, and sitting down at the Lord's table, are acts of a professor of religion, essentially different and distinct. Many evidently entertain the very opposite opinion. Accordingly, by many, the term "communion" is employed exclusively to denote participation together of

^{*} Testimony, p. 72, sec. ed. [†] Testimony, p. 135, fourth ed.

[‡] Ibid, p. 136: ^{||} Gen. xvii. 14. [¶] Gen. xvii. 11; Rom. iv. 11.

the sacrament of the Supper. Hence, too, appears to have originated the vague and unscriptural notion that there are degrees in communion. The man who receives baptism for his child, but who has never occupied a seat at the Lord's table, is supposed not to be in full communion with the Church. *Full communion* is an expression employed by such exclusively to denote the position of those who, in addition to other privileges, partake of the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of the Saviour. A very little reflection, however, will convince any man of ordinary intellect, that such an opinion is unfounded and erroneous. There is—there can be, no half way* in religion. An individual is either a member of the Church, or he is not. If he be a member of the Church at all, he is a member in full communion. Observe the order in which a person is admitted to the fellowship of saints. Those whom the Holy Ghost has made overseers in the Church, being satisfied with the measure of knowledge which the applicant possesses, and with his general deportment, demand of him a profession of his faith and a promise of obedience. On complying with these terms, he is admitted to Church membership. He is then a member in full communion with the Church, though months should elapse before he has an opportunity of sitting down at the Lord's table. It is only as a member of the Church that he has a right to Baptism for his children. "Infants descended from parents, either both, or but one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized."† "The infants of such as are members of the visible Church, are to be baptized."‡

When we assert that every baptized person is an acknowledged member of the visible Church, the phrase "visible Church" is to be understood as it is explained in the Con-

* See Appendix, No. 2. † Larger Catechism, Quest. 106.
‡ Shorter Catechism, Quest. 95.

profession of Faith, to denote "all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children." Of this "visible Church, which is also catholick or universal," *particular churches* are members.* Now the Sacraments are ordinances of the visible Church, and not the badges of any particular party; and connection by baptism with the whole body of the faithful, does not, of itself, entitle the receiver to the privilege of membership in any one congregation. "The communion of a particular Church is the public association of those who are agreed with regard to the doctrine and worship and government of the Church of Christ, for the purpose of observing divine institutions; and those who are admitted into it should have a competent measure of knowledge—should have a credible profession of their faith—and are bound to a conversation becoming the gospel, and to submit to the discipline of the Church."† On making this profession and these promises, he may be admitted to Church fellowship in a particular congregation. This is usually denominated *joining the Church*. He is then entitled to sealing ordinances, and to vote in the election of office bearers, and in the management of the affairs of that congregation. When we assert, therefore, that every baptized person is an acknowledged member of the visible Church, and yet refuse to admit that person to church fellowship in a particular congregation, until "he professes his faith in Christ and obedience to him," between our statements and our practice there is no discrepancy.

4. The Lord's Supper is not, in itself, an ordinance more solemn than Baptism. A different opinion is very commonly entertained, and often distinctly avowed. The once prevailing belief, that in the Sacrament of the Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ was not only spiritually, but corporally present, and that the communicant partook of the real flesh and blood of the Saviour, we have already assigned as

* Confession of Faith, chap. xxv., sect. 24. † Summary of Principles, p. 7.

the probable origin of this mistake. This doctrine, however, no sound Protestant will or can avow as the reason why he esteems the one sacrament to be more solemn than the other. The usual, if not the only argument brought forward to support the opinion which we are now opposing, is the declaration of the Apostle: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself."^{*} No assertion of such terrible import, it is triumphantly averred, can be found respecting baptism, in the sacred scriptures. Now, it is readily conceded that these words of the Apostle are very solemn. They were doubtless designed, as they are well calculated, to excite emotions of holy awe in the soul of the person who contemplates a solemn approach to God in this sacred rite. Far be it from us to attempt to diminish the reverence for this holy institution, which the words of the Apostle, properly understood, have a tendency to awaken. But is it not possible, nay probable, that you under-estimate the solemnity which ought to accompany the observance of other ordinances? The assertion that words equally alarming as those employed by the Apostle respecting the Lord's Supper, cannot be found in Scripture respecting Baptism, may be fairly questioned. But not to dwell upon matters of doubtful dispute, let us enquire into the mind of the spirit, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Eating and drinking unworthily, doubtless deserve eternal death. But this you know, is true of every sin.† The same language which is here employed in reference to eating and drinking unworthily, the same Apostle applies to resisting "the powers that be."[‡] It may be observed further that the original term translated "damnation," may with equal propriety be translated "judgment;" and you will find it so rendered in the margin. This is the translation preferred by the authors of

* 1 Cor. xi. 29. † Shorter Catechism, Quest. 84. ‡ Romans xiii. 2.

the Shorter Catechism.* By attending to the explanation which the Apostle has given of this subject, it will appear evident, that damnation, or judgment, in this passage, refers to bodily diseases or death. "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."† It is a chastisement sent for the very purpose of preventing eternal damnation. "When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."‡

But farther, observe the language which the spirit of inspiration employs respecting another ordinance. It will be readily admitted, we presume, that the phrase, "A savour of death unto death," though it may not grate so harshly on the ear, conveys to the mind an idea equally awful and terrific, as the phrase "eating and drinking damnation." It would not be difficult to show that it is even more so. Yet that expression is employed by the Apostle to denote the effect which follows unprofitable hearing of the word. "To the one, (that is, to them that perish) we are the savour of death unto death."§ It is evident then, that the phrase, "eating and drinking damnation," will not prove that the Lord's Supper is a more solemn ordinance than the preaching of the word. It cannot, therefore, be held as proving that it is more solemn than baptism. We do not however, intend to assert that the sacraments are not more solemn ordinances than the civil magistracy or the preaching of the word. We only assert that their superior solemnity cannot be proved or even inferred from the use of the expression "eating and drinking damnation."

That the sacraments are, and in the nature of the case must be, of equal solemnity, appears plainly from their common nature, and design. They are equally intended to be seals—seals, too, of the very same covenant, and to be signs of the blessings which that covenant contains. A seal is a stamp or impression annexed to a bargain, deed, will, &c.,

* Shorter Catechism, Question 97. † Verse 30. ‡ Verse 52.
§ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

rendering it legal and binding. It receives all its power to bind from its appointment for that purpose by competent authority; and all its importance depends upon the importance of the promises and obligations of the document to which it is appended. Both Sacraments have been appointed by the same Divine authority, and they are both seals of the same covenant,—a covenant in which the same blessings are conveyed, and the same obligations implied. In this respect, then, it is manifest that no greater solemnity should be attached to the one sacrament than to the other.

Again, a seal annexed to a covenant among men, is a more arbitrary and conventional sign. Apart from the object which it is intended to serve, it has no significancy.—Not so the seals appended to the covenant of grace. They are wisely adapted to enlighten the understanding, as well as to confirm the faith, of the recipient. The signs are significant—calculated to convey important instruction in an impressive form. They both refer primarily and principally to the death of Christ, and to the blessings which thence accrue to the believer. In its exhibition of these blessings, the sacrament of baptism gives particular prominence to the purifying efficacy of the Saviour's blood. Its encouraging declaration is, "the blood of Jesus Christ," God's "son, cleanseth from all sin."* In the Sacrament of the Supper, particular prominence is given to the nourishing and gladdening influences which flow from communion with Christ the Head. His language in it is, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."† "Baptism is to be administered but once, with water,—and that even to infants:—the Lord's supper is to be administered often in the elements of bread and wine,—and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves."‡ From these differences, not in the least affecting the nature of the Sacra-

*1 John i. 7. †John vi. 55. ‡Larger Catechism, Quest 177.

ments as seals, it surely cannot be inferred that the one is more solemn than the other. Since, then, the author of both sacraments is God—since the spiritual part of both is Christ and his benefits—since they both represent the same fundamental doctrines, privileges, and duties;—since they are seals of the same covenant, to be dispensed by the same office-bearers, and by none other—and since both are to be continued in the Church of Christ until his second coming,*—we are shut up to the conclusion that, in point of solemnity, they are perfectly equal.

5th. The qualifications which entitle parents to receive baptism for their children, entitle them also to occupy a seat at the Table of the Lord. If the correctness of the preceding statements be admitted, the truth of this assertion will, it may be presumed, be readily conceded. On account of the importance of this point, however, a few additional observations may be useful. What then is the grand qualification, the possession of which entitles a parent to baptism for his child? The answer is simple and explicit. It is faith in Jesus Christ. This is plainly the doctrine of the Confession of Faith. "The infants of one or both *believing* parents are to be baptized."† Such infants the apostle pronounces to be holy, while he declares that the children of unbelieving parents are unclean.‡ This scriptural statement fully sustains the position that faith on the part of one of the parents at least, is indispensably necessary to the baptism of the child. The same doctrine is taught in the shorter catechism, where it is stated that "the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized;"§ and in the larger catechism in these words: "Infants descended from parents either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized."¶ The church, it is true, cannot judge

*Larger Catechism, Question 176 †Confession, chap. xxviii. Section 4. ‡1 Cor. vii. 14. §Question 95. ¶ Question 166.

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the heart, and must be satisfied with the profession; and when that profession of faith is not contradicted by the life, the Church charitably believes it to be true as well as sincere. It is on the ground of the presumed faith of the parent that the child becomes entitled to this holy rite. And what is the grand qualification indispensably necessary to entitle an individual to a seat at the Lord's table? Our answer to the question is equally plain and explicit. It is faith in Jesus Christ. Wherever this faith exists, manifesting itself by leading to holiness of life, there is also a right to a seat at the Table of the Lord. This statement, it is believed, will not be disputed. The grand qualification which a parent must possess before his child is entitled to baptism, is also the qualification which fully entitles the parent himself to a seat at the Lord's Table.*

These remarks, it may be observed in passing, refer especially to the baptism of infants. The baptism of adults may, in some respects, be different and peculiar.

If the correctness of the preceding statements be admitted, the inconsistency of those who claim and receive baptism for their children, while they habitually neglect to observe the other sacrament, can be neither denied nor evaded. Why, permit us to ask, are parents so exceedingly anxious to obtain one of the seals of the covenant for their offspring, while they evince so little solicitude to obtain the other seal of the very same covenant for themselves? If the blessings of that covenant be so necessary to the well-being of their infant seed, they surely cannot be less necessary to the well-being of the parent. Infants being guilty of no actual transgression, can be considered as chargeable only with original sin. But to original sin, the parents have added a vast amount of actual transgression. Whence, then, this great anxiety respecting those whom the Scriptures represent as comparatively innocent,† contrasted with their sad indifference

* See Appendix, No. 2. † Jeremiah ii. 84.

respecting themselves, immeasurably more guilty and exposed to immeasurably greater danger than they are for whom such painful concern is pretended? Is there not much reason to suspect, that this anxiety originates in the belief that baptism operates to some extent like a charm—that it has, to some extent, an efficacy in itself, to take away sin—and that it produces its effect in some mysterious way—in a way quite different from the manner in which other ordinances tend to promote the salvation of the soul? If this superstitious sentiment be repudiated, must we suppose that the anxiety proceeds from a desire to conform to existing customs, and from the opinion that to allow their children to remain unbaptized, is a reflection on their own moral character? If so, we have no hesitation in saying that, to present a child to God in baptism from such a motive, is an awful profanation of a holy ordinance. It is a solemn mockery of the most High, and deserves the severest rebuke. It is far more likely to entail a curse than to procure a blessing. Do they assign as the reason of their application, that baptism is a holy ordinance, instituted by Christ, which, consequently, it is their duty to observe, and that so long as its observance is neglected, they have no reason to expect the approbation and blessing of the Great Head of the Church? If so, the reason is good,—the very best that can be assigned. But why does not the same reason constrain them to observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? Is it not also an institution of divine appointment? And have they any reason to expect the favor of God, while they refuse to recognise his authority; or to hope for the salvation of their souls, while they neglect to use the means which he has appointed for its attainment?

Permit us also to enquire, whence proceeds the reluctance to comply with the request and injunction of the Saviour, made in circumstances which appeal so eloquently to our tenderest sympathies and sensibilities,—his dying request—his dying injunction,—contrasted with the forward eagerness

with which application is made for the baptism of their children. Is it because they suppose that, by sitting down at the Lord's Table, they become bound more rigidly to the duties of a holy life, than when they only present their children to God in baptism? What more solemn vow, or what more comprehensive promise can they make at the Lord's Supper, or any where else, than the vow and promise which are usually made by parents at the baptism of their children? There they avouch the Lord to be their God; and there they promise, in the strength of divine grace, to walk before him in newness of life. Is it because they consider themselves unfit to sit down at the Lord's Table? If so, and if the estimate which they have formed of themselves be correct, they are unfit also to present their children to God in baptism. By their application for baptism they declare that they have faith. By asserting that they esteem themselves unprepared to sit down at the Sacramental Table, they declare that they have no faith. If they are believers, they are the children of God—they have a right to the children's bread, and to a seat at their Father's table. But if they are unbelievers, they have no right to baptism for their children, and their children have no right, *through them*, to receive it. Whilst they refuse to give themselves to the Lord, they are utterly incapacitated to give up their children to him. Upon no principle of common sense, reason or scripture, can they acknowledge the covenant for their children, while they continue to reject it for themselves. Their children may indeed be baptized, but not in virtue of their relation to unbelieving parents. Any member of the visible Church, under whose control they may be providentially placed may present them in baptism; but such members then become, in a certain sense, their moral parents, and are responsible for them.* Are they deterred from the Lord's Supper through fear that eating and drinking unworthily they eat and drink

* Int. to Bradbury on Baptism, p. 12.

judgment to themselves? Great, very great indeed, is the sin of eating and drinking unworthily at the sacramental table; and severe and greatly to be dreaded, are the rebukes and chastisements to which the unworthy communicant exposes himself. But are no fears to be entertained of an unworthy approach to God in the equally solemn ordinance of baptism? In that Sacrament there is a renewal of the covenant. Now, if an individual professes to take hold of God's covenant; and yet has no faith, or, in other words, is an unworthy receiver of that seal, he approaches to God with a lie in his right hand. He lies not unto men but unto God; and we know how fiercely the anger of Jehovah burned against Ananias and Sapphira, for a similar transgression.* Again, if, having made his vows at the baptism of his child, he afterwards neglect conscientiously to fulfil them, he exposes himself to the threatening denounced against those who forsake the covenant of their God. "They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant; thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field."† "But unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver."‡ Let those, then, who scruple to approach the Holy table on the ground of their unworthiness, but boldly come forward to the baptismal font,—let all

* Acts v. 1—10. † Hos. x. iv. ‡ Ps. l. 16—22.

those who consider the qualifications necessary for an acceptable appearance at the former ordinance, higher than those which are required in order to an acceptable observance of the latter,—let all those who consider one sacrament more solemn than the other, read attentively, and ponder prayerfully, the following passages of God's Holy Word:—Lev. xxvi. 15—39; Jer. xxxiv. 18, 20; Hos. viii. 1. "We speak as unto wise men, judge ye what we say."*

But besides the inconsistency of the practice upon which we are animadverting, its baneful and withering influence upon vital religion, ought not to be overlooked. Error is always injurious in proportion to the importance of the subject about which it is entertained. The Sacraments of the New Testament are exceedingly important institutions. Erroneous sentiments respecting their nature and design, are correspondingly injurious. Now, the practice which we are so anxious to remove from our midst, by seeming to countenance, tends to cherish and strengthen the incorrect opinions upon this subject to which we have already adverted. Many, through ignorance of the nature and design of baptism, consider it as little more than an unmeaning form, by the observance of which respectable men pay a hollow compliment to religion. Others expect from it some substantial benefit, but of the manner in which baptism is to be instrumental in its attainment, they have very crude and inaccurate conceptions. Many appear afraid to leave their children unbaptized, and yet seem to have no fear of God before their own eyes. They appear to esteem baptism as more indispensably necessary for their infant seed, than faith and repentance for themselves.† By all these classes, in order to obtain what they think a privilege, through the influence of custom, or example, or ignorance, or something worse, truth is violated. They profess what they do not believe, and promise what they never intend to perform.

* 1 Cor. x. 15. † Bradbury on Baptism, p. 44.

Persons who are in every respect conformed to the world, and who scarcely pretend to be religious, boldly come forward, and in the most solemn manner profess to take hold of God's covenant, and engage to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord—to worship God daily in their families and in secret—and to walk before him in all holy obedience. These engagements, in process of time, come to be disregarded alike by those who make them, and by those who exact them. Thus the most solemn and impressive rites of religion are regarded as empty ceremonies, and the form only to be esteemed as important. Many, it is to be feared, in this way, in the most solemn circumstances, profess what they do not believe, and promise what they have very little intention to perform, apparently without remorse, who would startle with horror at the very thought of practising the same duplicity in the transaction of their worldly business. How unequal are the notions of ungodly men about religion!

Perhaps some may be disposed to enquire: In what manner then is baptism designed and calculated to promote the spiritual interests of those who have received it in infancy? This is a matter of very great importance entitled to a more extensive and minute discussion than we have, at present, space to devote to it. We must not however close our address without offering a few remarks upon a subject at once so interesting and important.

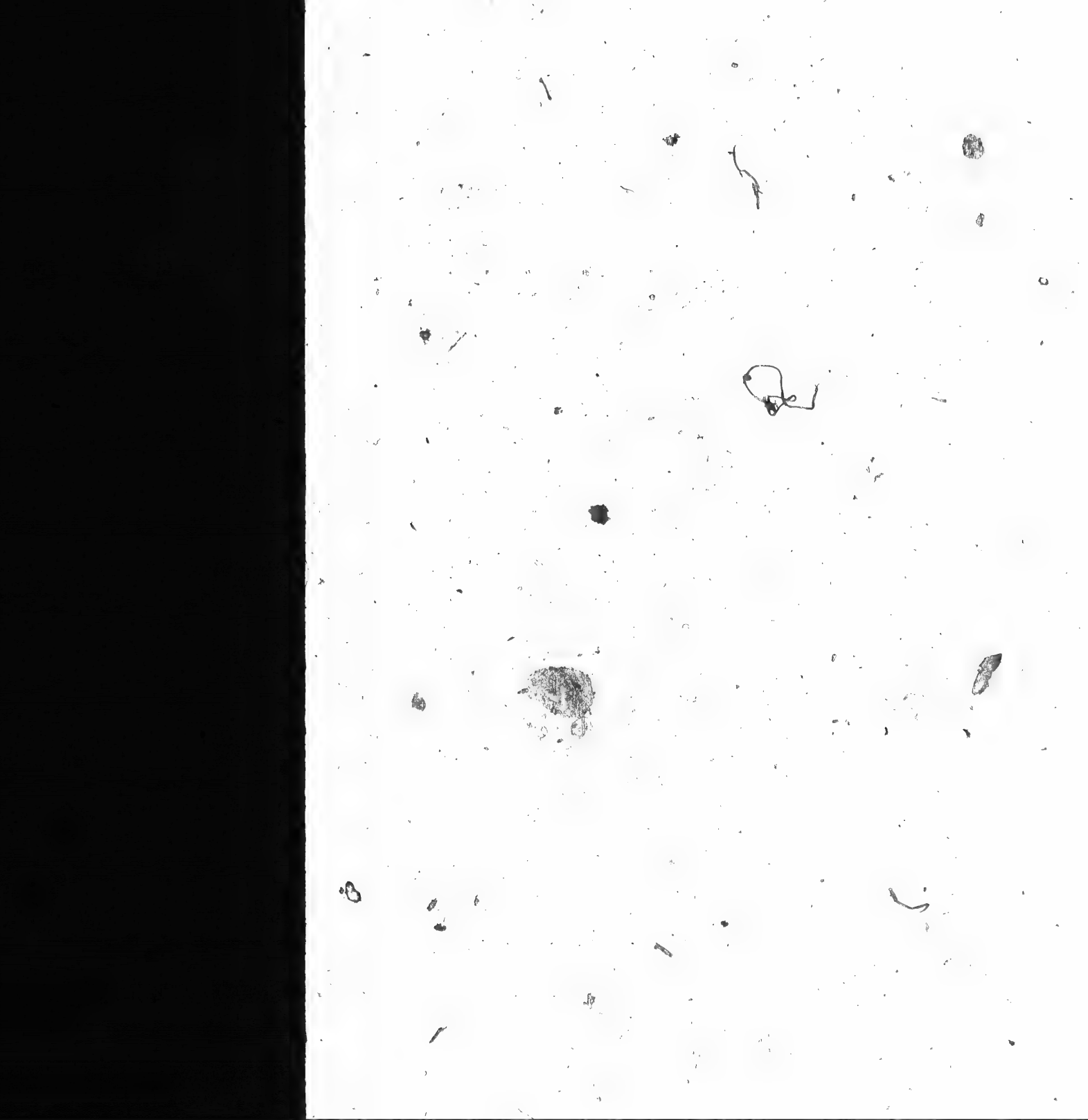
Of the benefits which result from the administration of this rite to children dying in infancy, we know little or nothing. In their intimations respecting the ultimate destiny of those who are removed from this state of preparation before the dawn of reason in the soul, the scriptures are very reserved. We know that they, in common with all the natural descendants of the first Adam, are guilty and depraved. It is also one of the things universally believed among us,

* See Appendix, No. 1.

that not a few of them inhabit the realms of unchanging bliss. We know also, that before they can be admitted into that holy and happy place, their guilt must be cancelled, their persons accepted, and their natures sanctified. Of the manner in which these effects are wrought, and an interest in Christ obtained, we acknowledge our profound ignorance. We would not attempt to be wise above what is written. Respecting those, however, who survive the period of infancy and childhood, the case is entirely different. Acquaintance with scriptural principles, enables us clearly to perceive the exact adaptation of this institution to the accomplishment of the contemplated end. Without pretending to enumerate and explain all the modes in which baptism may promote the religious interests of those to whom it has been administered in infancy, the following brief and general view of the subject must suffice for the present.

The church is the school of Christ. In this school are to be acquired that knowledge and those habits which qualify for the business and employments of the heavenly state. This view of the subject is presented to us in the apostolic commission: "Go ye therefore and teach," or disciple, or make scholars of, "all nations, baptizing," &c.* The same view of it is also presented to us in the statement of the apostle respecting circumcision. Its principal design, he informs us, was, to make the person circumcised practically acquainted with the doctrines and duties of the word of God. "What advantage then hath the Jew, or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God."* Baptism is the ordinance by which their admission into that school is formally recognised. There they are to obtain the knowledge and acquire the habits which will fit them for uniting with holy intelligencies in the exercises of adoration and praise in the upper sanctuary. Baptism is designed and

* Mat. xxviii. 19. † Rom. iii. 12.



happily adapted to secure these ends. During the period of infancy and childhood, the Church as a body, can do but little directly in the work of religious education. At the same time, this period of life is immensely important. Then impressions are made and habits formed, which tend powerfully to direct the current of subsequent thought and activity into a particular channel. Now, as far as the circumstances of the case will admit, baptism provides for this important period, by binding the parents, in a very solemn manner, and by very solemn vows, to give religious instruction, to set a religious example,—and to administer religious discipline, to their baptized offspring. It becomes the duty of the office-bearers of the Church to endeavour to ascertain whether or not these vows have been performed; and by the authority with which Christ has invested them, for edification not for destruction, to enforce their fulfilment. If these duties be faithfully discharged, the most effective means are employed for repressing and subduing the sinful propensities of depraved nature in their infancy, and for enlisting the most powerful principles of our nature in the service of religion. Then, as the baptized persons advance in age, and in the developement of their intellectual and moral powers, additional and more direct appliances for the same purposes are to be used by the church as a body. When they have arrived at about the age of fourteen years, the office-bearers of the Church, without relieving the parents, in the slightest degree, from the discharge of their duty, must commence the work of inspection and instruction. By counsel and entreaty, by warning and reproof, those whom the Holy Ghost has made overseers, must endeavour to preserve them from the paths in which destroyers go, and to lead them in the way everlasting. Every member of the Church is likewise bound to take an interest in their welfare, and to assist, both directly and indirectly, in this labour of love.

Our object in this address, dear brethren, is not to lessen

in any degree the reverence and solemnity with which the Lord's Supper should be observed. We do desire, however, to heighten in your esteem the importance and solemnity of Baptism. This initiatory rite, we hope you are now persuaded, is no unmeaning form. It is connected with important advantages and with solemn obligations. It is not designed to supersede the necessity of parental anxiety and parental exertion; but, on the contrary, to stimulate both. Like other ordinances of divine appointment, it is intended, in the first place, to instruct and to secure instruction; and then, through the medium of an enlightened intellect, to operate upon the springs of human activity, and thus to prepare for holiness and heaven. The individual who trusts to the reception of the external rite for his own salvation, or for the salvation of the children whom God hath given him, without endeavoring diligently and prayerfully to work out the grand design for which the ordinance has been appointed, will find that he has been trusting to a broken reed, which will not only fail to afford him any support in the time of his greatest necessity, but, pressed down under a load of accumulated guilt, will pierce him through with many sorrows. Where this ordinance is solicited, merely in conformity with custom, or for superstitious ends, instead of proving a blessing, it will become as "the bitter waters that cause the curse." "But, brethren, we hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."* If you comprehend the nature and tendency of this ordinance, and in the observance of it, in humble dependence on the divine blessing, diligently labour to work out the design of its institution, you may confidently promise yourselves the pleasure of beholding your children walking in the truth. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."† Were parents, and elders, and members of the Church generally,

* Heb. vi, 9. † Pro. xiii, 24.

faithful in the discharge of the duties distinctly shadowed out in this ordinance, and connected with it, the Church would soon present an altered and greatly improved aspect. "The light of the moon" would be "as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun" would be "seven fold, as the light of seven days."* "The righteous" would "see it and rejoice; and all iniquity" would "stop her mouth."† "Truth" would "spring out of the earth, and righteousness" would look down from heaven."‡ Zion would "break forth on the right hand and on the left; and" her "seed" would "inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."§ "The wilderness and the solitary place" would "rejoice and blossom as the rose. It" would "blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon" would "be given to it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they" would "see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God."§

MAY THE LORD HASTEN IT IN HIS TIME.

* Is. xxx. 26. † Ps. cvii. 42. ‡ Ps. lxxxv. 11. § Is. liv. 3.
 § Is. xxiv. 1, 2.

APPENDIX.

The preceding address will doubtless fall into the hands of many who have but few opportunities of perusing other works upon the same subject. To such, the statements which it contains may appear novel and extreme. To satisfy the reader that this is not the case, the writer of this address, on his own responsibility, subjoins a few extracts from authors of approved orthodoxy, containing statements in perfect unison with the sentiments here expressed. A considerable volume might be filled with similar extracts. The following are given merely as specimens—

EXTRACT No. I.

"I think there is a practice which pays too great a compliment to this scandalous notion," (*viz: that there is no salvation without baptism,*) "and that is hurrying on the baptism of a child because it is sick. For this I can see no show of argument, unless it springs from the root of bitterness that I have been speaking of. I rather think a dying creature, one of whose recovery we have no hope, cannot be the object of baptism. That ordinance was never designed to be used among Protestants as extreme unction is among Papists."

"We do, and I think with a great deal of justice, refuse to administer the Lord's Supper to a person on a deathbed;

and I cannot see but the argument is as conclusive against this abuse of Baptism. *He that believes makes not haste.* If God has given me a child I shall resign it to him very often before I do it in a solemn ordinance; and if he denies me an opportunity of expressing this, in the manner I think it ought to be done, it will be no part of my uneasiness, if it dies unbaptized. It is better, I think, to leave such a duty *undone*, than not to have it *well done*. God never expects it, either from you or me, when he has thrown a bar in our way, that we break it or leap over it. There is no more harm in your not doing it, than there was in David's not building the Temple. You had *made provision for it*, and you did *well in that it was in your heart*.—Perhaps you are not so much in haste for the baptism of your child from the supposition that there is no salvation without it. But what if an uninstructed neighbour puts this sense on the zeal you show to have it done, and conclude it is, for the same reason that would have moved *him* to do so? You may in this lay the foundation of a great uneasiness to him, if the Providence of God should do, what we have ten thousand examples of, snatch away the child on a sudden. The error of his judgment is enough to throw him into melancholy, and thus through thy knowledge shall thy weak brother offend."—*Bradbury on Baptism.*

"Applications to ministers for dispensing the ordinance of baptism to sick infants, as appeals to their sympathy, are not easily resisted; and yet compliance with such requests is rather to be excused than justified,—if it indeed admit even of excuse. In most cases, the application proceeds from superstition; and in all cases, compliance has a tendency to encourage this pernicious emotion, if not in the parties immediately concerned, certainly in others who come to the knowledge of the fact. The tender sorrow excited in the bosoms of parents by the sight of suffering infancy, and the painful apprehension of the death of a beloved child, are feelings naturally allied with superstitious fears, in the

breasts of those who are not accurately acquainted with the doctrines and power of Godliness. In such a state of mind, arguments which otherwise have little force, appear conclusive. 'Baptism being one of the means of grace, it is an act of injustice toward the child to deprive him of it in the prospect of death.' This is the only argument worthy of being at all examined on this subject; and even this has no weight when placed in the balance against the powerful reasoning of the author. The baptism of dying infants, and the administration of the Lord's Supper to dying adults, must stand or fall together. To neglect for a length of time the baptism of our children is indeed improper, and to administer the ordinance for fear of the child's death, proceeds from the same principle;—the want of a disposition to attend to every ordinance of God on the first opportunity for doing so, according to due order. The seal of circumcision was applied to infants on the eighth day; and this fact shows that the corresponding seal ought not in its application to be needlessly delayed, or unbelievably hastened. Many infants must have died in Israel before the eighth day, and of course uncircumcised. The private baptism of the sick leads to private baptism, as a general practice; and the general practice leads to the abuse of this sacrament by its administration to the unworthy. A sacrament, belonging to the Church of God as a visible society, in covenant with him, ought to be administered publicly before the Church."

—Note on the preceding extract by Drs. Romeyn and McLeod.

EXTRACT No. II.

"HALF WAY COVENANT.—A scheme adopted by the Congregational Churches of New England in 1657—1662, in order to extend the privileges of Church membership and infant baptism beyond the pale of actual communicants at

the Lord's Table. 'The name itself indicates,' says Dr. Wesner, 'that religion and the observance of its sacred rites, were extensively becoming, in the estimation of the people, a sort of half way business, and of course its energy and vitality dying away.' 'It is now universally abandoned by the evangelical Congregational Churches in New England.'—*Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by the Rev. John N. Brown.*

EXTRACT No. III.

"This, I think, may be laid down as a principle, that I am to admit no child to baptism, one of whose parents I would not receive to the Table of the Lord. Nor should any adult person be allowed one ordinance, who gives sufficient ground of debarring him from the other.—*Bradbury on Baptism.*

"Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two and only Sacraments of the New Testament. The qualifications for admission are the same, whether a man apply for baptism to himself or his child, or apply for a seat at the Lord's Table, because the covenant in each case is the same. That man who seeks to have his child baptized, and has no intention to commemorate in the other sacrament the death of the Redeemer, cannot have thought both seriously and accurately upon the subject of Sacraments. If a friend should enter into a bond with me, to which the law required the application of two distinct seals, I must esteem him either very weak or very insincere, if, while he is anxious to apply one seal he is determined to have nothing to do with the other.—*Notes by Drs. Rameyn and McLeod.*

"Church membership entitles us to both these privileges, [baptism and the Lord's Supper,] of Christian fellowship. It is the fact of embracing the covenant that gives a title to the seals.—*Ibid.*

EXTRACT No. IV.

"Q. Wherein appears the folly of those who solicit baptism for their children, while they neglect the Lord's Supper?

A. The observance of the one cannot be acceptable in the neglect of the other.

Q. How are we to account for the conduct of those who claim baptism for their children while they observe not the Lord's Supper?

A. Were it not discreditable in the eyes of the world to have children in a family unbaptized, they would neglect both.

Q. How have such persons been so long indulged in the Church?

A. From false impressions of the necessity of baptism and from the influence of a worldly spirit."—*Dr. Belfrage's Guide to the Lord's Table.*

